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# MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES.

Baltimore, December, 1900.

## THE REFORM OF FRENCH ORTHOGRAPHY.

M. FERDINAND BRUNOT opens the third part of his elaborate study of the French language during the Nineteenth Century in Petit de Julleville's *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature française des origines à 1900* with these words :

"La seule chose qui soit restée debout dans ce siècle de tourmente, c'est l'orthographe, universellement reconnue détestable."

The book was hardly out of the printer's hands when the much-talked-of edict of the Minister of Public Instruction in France, M. Georges Leygues, was published in the *Journal officiel* of August 1, 1900. So the century did not die, after all, without having seen this last fortress of traditional prejudice stormed; and everybody who has studied the question, even if he be not a partisan of the reform, must grant that the champions of the cause deserve to attain their goal in the century that witnessed the long contest.

Of course, the battle for reform of orthography has not stirred up public opinion to the same extent, nor in the same manner either, as the discussion of social problems, the solution of which is of more immediate and urgent importance.

As a matter of fact, however, the struggle has been both bitter and long. It was started contemporaneously with the general revolution of social ideas. Between the successive steps of the movement in favor of a reform of orthography and the evolution of political events of the century, there is even a kind of correlation, which is often most remarkable.

Before the Revolution, or more exactly, before Napoleon, no attention was paid to orthography, and consequently there were no mistakes in writing, properly so called. The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* stood there as a kind of authority in the matter, but it was not expected of anybody to conform to its demands. The liberties the great authors, as well as the second-rank writers, took have been pointed out often enough: Bossuet, who

wrote indifferently *apôtre* and *apostre*, *connaître* and *conêtre*, *prophète* and *profête*; Racine using in the same sense *compter* and *conter*; Voltaire alternatively spelling *philosophie* and *filosofie*, *style* and *stîle*, *jésuite* and *jésuitte*, in the same sentence *je sçay* and *je sçais*; Rousseau using in the space of a single page as many as four different orthographies for a single word; nay even the Academy in the first edition of its dictionary writing both *dictionnaire* and *dictionaire*, *fantosme* and *phantosme*, etc.

The new system of schools which followed upon the Revolution, the system in which Latin and Greek ceased to be the main studies in order to give precedence to more practical subjects, induced a strong need for more harmony in orthography. But nobody dreamed of such an imposing body of rules, bristling with exceptions, as those now in force. Several attempts were first made to solve the problem in a direct way.

The French mind has always been very fond of two qualities which seem to be rather incompatible: freedom on one hand, and rule, method, centralization on the other. As this second quality—so strongly insisted upon by Stuart Mill—has always proved one of the foremost obstacles to the realization of the political ideal of the Revolution (we even to-day, see the Republic in earnest conflict with the powerful foe of bureaucracy), so too, has it brought about the puzzling problem of French orthography, and the struggle we are now witnessing is a period of its evolution which seems to many of momentous importance.

The question as it presented itself at first sight was this: to combine a system of homogeneous orthography with a system that would not impose any restriction on the mind of the writer. The solution obviously was to be found in a system of phonetic orthography; and this, in its turn, was to be realized in the simplest way by inventing an alphabet that would suit the purpose. Domergue offered in his *Manuel des étrangers* an alphabet of twenty-one vowels and nineteen consonants. This was in 1805. In 1808 the "Université" was

organized by Napoleon, but no attention was given to the system of Domergue. On the contrary the Université had to get along with the means at hand, and in imposing all over the country an orthography based on uncertain and complicated principles, became the very instrument of favoring the reign of the narrow and often fanciful orthography which still rules us. Some men of influence, as Volney and Destutt de Tracy, advocated in vain a more reasonable orthography than the one accepted. Other occupations prevented the re-organizers of society from directing their attention to the matter. Then, under the impulsion of the first Romanticists, came the revolution in the language which caused theorists on orthography to be silent for many years. The *Société grammaticale* founded by Domergue had taken sides against the audacities of the newcomers. But once this fight over and the question of orthography taken up again, it became from conservative, progressive. Marle proposed a new system of letters, on the same plan as Domergue, but simpler: one sign for each sound, and addition of only two new letters, ñ for the sound "gn" and ǝ for "ll" between two vowels (file, bataillon). This was in 1827. A propaganda was organized. It was at first a great success. Marle is said to have received thirty-three thousand letters from adherents to the scheme. The King-to-be, Louis Philippe, himself, was very much in favor of it. The whole affair took a political turn. In 1830, while thanks to this latter circumstance, success seemed to be very near, the Revolution suddenly overthrew both the government and the hopes of the reformists.

The claims for simplification continued, but the further away we get from the time of the great Revolution the less decided do we find the demands.

However, a third attempt for a phonetic orthography was still made before they definitely gave up the hope of reaching at once this radical idea. It came from Switzerland where several societies had been formed; at their head was M. Raoux, who proposed a certain program in 1865. In 1866 the book of A. F. Didot, *Observations sur l'orthographe*—which called forth the approbation of such men as

Littre and Sainte-Beuve—aroused again the attention of the general public of France to the subject.<sup>1</sup> After preliminary debates which ended in an agreement between the scholars of France and Switzerland, the *Echo des réformes*, 1870, was just going to print (using the new orthography) when the war broke out. In 1871 the question of *Néographie* was taken up again. New discussions arose, which could not be settled for a long time. In 1876 Didot died. This marked the end of the effort.

But in the meantime the problem had been considered by another group of men. Giving up at once the revolutionary idea of substitution of a phonetic orthography for that in existence, they decided to accomplish their end by the way of gradual improvements. Of course the final purpose was the same as before.

From a strictly logical point of view each reform of orthography—in the other languages, as well as in French—tends towards the application of phonetic principles. It would probably not be difficult to reduce most differences existing among the improvements proposed to those of *plus* and *moins*. In any case the new advocates of the reform, those who adopted the method of evolution instead of revolution, have finally carried off the honors of the victory in the contest before us.

There exist to-day two societies in France for the advancement of the cause. The first was founded by MM. Bescherelle and Malvezin in 1872 and is the most conservative of the two. The other with more distinctive phonetic tendencies was started by M. Passy,

<sup>1</sup> So much was it aroused that in 1867 it was discussed at the "International Congress of Labor" at Lausanne. One sees at once that there is a great sociological question connected with the reform of orthography. At all events, in case of a sudden and thorough change, as was then thought of, momentous consequences might be expected. If all our books were to be published over again in a new form, it would mean a tremendous pressure in all lines of business connected in any way with book-making. As M. Renard very well says: "Il y a des millions et des millions qui dorment sous cette question de la réforme orthographique." Later on as new orthography means suppression of useless letters, books would be shorter, smaller and cheaper. What to do with poetry, which of course, would not allow the application of the new orthography, is a difficulty which will not be easily solved. Are French children—to speak only of those—in order to enjoy literature, to learn the old orthography? Then the reform would hardly pay for them, since they would have two grammars to be acquainted with instead of one, as now.

and existed some time before being officially organized in 1888. The adhesion of M. Havet in 1888 was an event of great importance, and so was that of M. Clédât in 1889. It is often called the Havet-Passy-Clédât Society, these three being the names of the men who have contributed most towards its development.

The principal act of the Association was the report known as the *Pétition Havet* sent to the French Academy in 1890 and signed by over eight thousand (some allow only seven thousand) people. The Academy took no action; but in 1891 the Minister of Public Instruction, M. Léon Bourgeois, sent his famous *Circulaire*, requesting those in charge of the examination for the "Certificat d'Études" to be lenient with the candidates who permitted themselves to be guided by reasonable principles at the expense of fanciful grammar rules (for example, write *genous*, instead of *genoux*, *étaus* like *landaus*, *paysane* like *courtisane*, etc.). Then the Academy thought it best to do something also, and requested M. Gréard to prepare a report on the subject, the report to be presented to the Commission du dictionnaire; which was another important event in the campaign, since the author of the report was distinctly not on the conservative side. However, nothing more was done by the Academy.

So the reformers tried to influence the political powers. In 1896 a petition, written by M. G. Renard, in the name of various societies for the reform of Orthography [such societies had been founded in the meanwhile in Belgium in 1892, in Algeria in 1894, and in Switzerland in 1896] was presented to the Minister of Public Instruction, M. Combes. The latter chose a permanent commission, at the head of which was placed M. Gréard; with him were men like MM. Gaston Paris, Liard, Brisson, Hémon, etc. Once more politics interfered with the success of the scheme, as the ministry was overthrown shortly after this. The successor of M. Combes never called the Commission together.

Since that time the societies have been very active indeed, but no event of importance transpired until July, 1899, when after a vote of the Union des Instituteurs et Institutrices de la Seine it was decided that an orthography

different from the one of the Academy would be considered valid for the bestowal of the *brevet* and *certificat d'études*. It was nothing else but the acceptance of the *Circulaire Bourgeois* of 1891, but a great victory nevertheless, since by this step the reform had finally passed the threshold of the University of France. Finally came the *Arrêté ministériel* of July last.

Before speaking of it at length, if we wish to do justice to everybody, we ought at least to mention the names of some men who have contributed towards bringing about the new orthography. Outside of the members of committees or associations—Havet, Gréard G. Paris, Clédât—two or three have distinguished themselves in the campaign. Francisque Sarcey, who tried to influence daily papers to use a simplified orthography; Anatole France, in two memorable articles in 1898, when he goes so far as to call Noël and Chap-sal, the late representatives of the orthodox grammar of so many years *malfaiteurs publics*; and we may add the name of Émile Faguet, who more than once advocated, in strong terms, the reform.

Two more people deserve to be quoted here, who have devoted their lives to the success of the cause, M. Auguste Renard, who fights especially with his pen—he is the "Secrétaire général de l'Association pour la Simplification de l'Orthographe"—and M. Jean Barès, the director of the *Réformiste*, who has contributed large sums of money. After having realized an immense fortune during his thirty years in South America, he came back to France in 1896, and decided to devote a part of his wealth towards rendering the French orthography as simple as, for instance, the Spanish. He edits his magazine—first, monthly, then bimensual, soon to be weekly—entirely according to the new system of spelling.

But in spite of all the efforts of skilful and devoted men, the success of the reform might have been retarded for a long time, had it not been for the schools themselves.

This action, however, did not exert itself as would at first be thought. It has not been in advocating simplification that its power was felt; on the contrary, by exaggerating the importance and insisting upon the minute and

odd rules of orthography, the schools suggested the reaction, and strengthened it as years passed by, because of their devoting considerable time to teaching the non-essentials of French grammar.

In fact, one of the foremost claims of the reformists, from Volney and Destutt de Tracy down to M. Renard, and through Didot, has been that the longest and dreariest study of childhood did not afford any opportunity to exert the reasoning faculties. Far from listening to these claims, the schools—or the “Université” followed opposite principles. On the other hand, it must be admitted, if they developed as they actually did, it was not altogether unnatural. France, like all other nations during this century, has done much towards improving her schools. Now as one of the most important subjects taught in France has always been a good knowledge of the mother tongue, so one of the means of showing improvement was a constantly more correct and minute knowledge of the requirements of orthography. In the first part of the century, even a man like Vigny did not care much about grammar; his making *ange* and *archange* feminine is well known. Lamartine also committed sins of this kind, failing to apply the rules of the past participle, and sometimes applying the wrong one; he went so far as to confuse *prêt à* and *près de*. Such mistakes nowadays would not happen with even small school-boys. Besides, sociological causes contributed not a little towards the same result. For years the teaching profession has been overcrowded in the most exasperating way. Statistics have been published often enough to illustrate this difficult problem of overproduction of school-masters. The school authorities took advantage of these conditions in order to select the most able among the crowd of candidates; and those determining the selection steadily became more exacting in the preparation required. As the “aspirants au brevet” showed themselves equally well prepared on the fundamental questions, the choice had to take into account the preparation in the details of the program. For this purpose the subtleties of grammar served admirably, and so by and by, the exceptions to rules happened to form the most important part of the preparation. The result was that

those best acquainted with the irrationalities of French grammar were those designated to be the teachers of French youth. And as a matter of course, the more they themselves had become accustomed to look at those subtleties as the main part of the study of orthography, the more they would, in their turn, insist upon them with their own pupils. This exaggerated attention paid to these trifles has been general for quite a while now. In the military school of St. Cyr, for instance, while in all other branches no mark would cause the candidate to fail definitely except 0, for orthography 10 (out of 20) is required for entrance examination. Napoleon I, whose orthography was very fanciful, would have most certainly been refused admission to St. Cyr, had he presented himself in our days.

The armies of candidates for the *brevet*, and for entrance into higher institutions of learning has not ceased growing in later years; the progress in the exacting spirit of examiners had to keep pace with this fact. So the true condition of things became widely known and appreciated; the ridiculous side of it appeared more and more obvious; and the necessity of a reform imposed itself upon the public mind with increasing and, at last, irresistible force.

The edict itself is now known to everybody. I will only sum up the main points in it.

*Article:* More liberty in the use or suppression of the article; rule of the partitive article done away with (*du bon pain* or *de bon pain*); liberty as to the agreement of the article with the superlative (on a abattus les arbres *les plus exposés* or *le plus exposés à la tempête*); liberty of using or not the article before certain proper names (aller *en* Portugal or aller *au* Portugal).

*Substantive:* suppression of change of gender from the singular to the plural (*amour, orgue*); suppression of the change of gender according to the proper and figurative sense of certain words (*œuvre*); suppression of rule of gender for “paque.”

*Proper nouns:* The plural allowed for all senses of the words (les *Virgiles*, editions, and les *Virgiles*, copies).

*Nouns of foreign origin:* Uniformity of rule in the same sense (*exceals* in the plural as well as *déficits*).

**Compound nouns:** Suppression of the hyphen allowed, and fusion of both words into one (*choufleur*, *essuimain*, *blancseing*, or *choufleur*, *essui-main*, *blanc-seing*), and plural formed accordingly (*choufleurs*, *essuimains*, *blancseings*).<sup>2</sup> Suppression of the apostrophe in words like *grandmère*, *grandroute*.

**Adjective:** Suppression of the hyphen in compound adjectives (*nouveauné*, *courtvetu*), and plural accordingly. *Nu*, *demi*, *feu*, allowed to agree whether before or after the modified noun. *Vingt* and *cent*: use of plural form in any case of multiplication by a preceding number. *Mille* may remain with this orthography when used for dates.

**Preposition:** Very little attention paid to the use of the preposition before names of countries (all *en* Portugal and *au* Portugal) (see "article" above).

**Adverb and Conjunction:** After verbs like "craindre," "empêcher," suppression of the *ne* allowed. After conjunctions "de peur que," "à moins que," "avant que," same suppression of *ne*.

**Verb:** Before a plural, permission in any case to use *c'est* or *ce sont*. Verbs requiring the adverb *ne*, see above. Rule of *Past participle* with "avoir" suppressed.

An acceptance of these reforms is not to be imposed. They may be applied or not, at everybody's own choice; it is a pure matter of toleration. However, the "Article 2" of the *arrêté*, practically secures the actual application by all, if not in our generation, surely in the next one, provided the text be carried through. This is the text of the said article:

"Dans les établissements d'enseignement public de tout ordre, les usages et prescriptions contraires aux indications énoncées dans

<sup>2</sup> The chapter in the edict on compound nouns seems to have undergone changes. The first report from France as to the reform, threatened much more radical modifications. For example, there were to be many fanciful looking words such as *tétetete*, *essuimain*, *chidéuvre*. When, however, the little pamphlet "Simplification de l'enseignement de la syntaxe française" was issued and sold to the public, these words had disappeared. One, however, was left: *chéfliu* (*chef-liu*), and plural *chéflioux*. According to present rules of French pronunciation, this new word is altogether irrational; in its new form, it would have to be pronounced *che-flieu* (*che* with the mute *e* sound). In order to indicate the pronunciation by the orthography it would be necessary either to write *chéfliu*, or *chéliu*,—or perhaps still better keep the old form of *chef-liu*.

la liste annexée au présent arrêté ne seront pas enseignés comme règles."

Thus, if not taught as rules, they will not be applied by the next generation of school children, and so be out of use before long.

It is not necessary to say that the reform has been discussed a good deal. If there was practically not a single voice that would condemn the decision altogether, that is, that would attack the principle of reform, on the other hand we do not know of any that would have approved it all. This shows as well as any direct demonstration that the authorities have not taken altogether the right ground.

In fact, if one carefully examines the text before us, and the circumstances under which the reform was decided, it is impossible not to be struck by a certain awkwardness in the way of proceeding. And if you think of the men who worked out the points of the "arrêté"—MM. Gaston Paris, Gréard, Croiset, Paul Meyer, etc.—you are still more surprised. I ask to be permitted to give a few examples in order to justify this accusation of lack of consistency in the work of the commission.

In the chapter of the substantive, they have done away with some exceptions concerning proper names, foreign words and compound nouns, while they did not touch the much larger class of common nouns. With a single pen stroke they could have simplified a number of times more than they actually did in taking up a number of secondary cases.

They were very eager to suppress the exception of *mil*, instead of *mille* in dates. But they did not think that similar cases of exceptional double letters come up over and over again in other classes of adjectives. Instead of reaching simplification in one word, they might with exactly the same trouble have reached hundreds of words in suppressing the doubling of the consonant in some words for the formation of the feminine by writing, for instance, *sote* like *devote*.

They also have done away with the exception of *vingt* and *cent*, not being allowed the mark of the plural if followed by another number. It seems that it would have been much simpler to unify the whole rule of adjectives of numbers, in other words to drop the exception of

*cent* and *vingt* alone taking the sign of the plural.

It would be easy to multiply examples. How, for instance, could they allow the plural for *aucun*, with the negative *ne*, which obviously means "not a single one," etc.?

Now where does this tendency come from? It is difficult to say. Either the members of the commission did not take time for a careful solution of the points to be first reformed according to a sensible way of going to work, or they may have tried to make concessions, but in such a fashion that although it looked like a reform, in fact only some few minor points were granted to calm the passion of the true reformists.

In both cases it is bad for the principle of the reform. The work being open to such wide criticism, will not gain many adherents among thinking people. It is at all events striking to see how little they took into consideration the preparatory work done by the reformists. The points that have been attacked in the most fierce manner and for the longest time (for instance in the *Journal des Instituteurs*) have been, you may almost say, systematically ignored.

If we come to the most sensational feature of the commission, the suppression of the rules of the past participle with "avoir," we feel still more embarrassed. I cannot help confessing that, for a moment, the idea took hold of me that we might perhaps have before us simply an attempt to compromise, once for all, the cause of reform. It has always been obvious to everybody that, even if not very simple, the rules of the participle are reasonable.

The reformists themselves did not dream of touching them, except by always suppressing the agreement when the participle with "avoir" is accompanied by *en*. As the commission now puts it, that the past participle with "avoir" is always allowed to remain invariable, does it not look decidedly too much as if the reform had been made just to please a crowd of ignorant or unintelligent people, without any consideration whatever as to the justification of the action? The members of the commission ought not to have permitted themselves to be guided by the misleading and prevailing superficial democratic creeds of the

day, that whatever is simple is good. To reduce everything to the level of the lower classes may be—perhaps (?)—justified in other domains; certainly it will never be in the domain of science. "Easy" is not synonymous with "good;" far from it. M. Brunetière certainly struck the right note when he wrote: "S'il y a lieu de simplifier la syntaxe ou de réformer l'orthographe, il est inadmissible que la simplification ou cette réforme soient réglées par les exigences de l'école primaire; . . . il y a quelque chose de barbare à défigurer ainsi la physionomie de nos textes classiques, pour complaire aux familles de quelques candidats fonctionnaires et . . . enfin l'idée seule de prétendre simplifier systématiquement la syntaxe est le contraire d'une idée libérale, d'une idée scientifique et d'une idée de progrès."

But there is something else of still more gravity. The members of the commission seem to have forgotten that doing away with the rules of the past participle with *avoir* implies the ignorance of one of the characteristic features of the French language, the flexion of all determinative words. Some have tried to invoke the example of other languages like English where the past participle remains invariable, and where nobody is shocked by the lack of agreement in any case. This is perfectly true, but we cannot always compare two languages. For instance, we cannot compare the construction of the sentences in a language with flexion of words, Latin or German, with that in languages without flexion of the nouns, English or French. While in Latin we can say indifferently *Pater castigat puerum* and *Puerum castigat pater*, we cannot do the same in English and say indifferently *the father punishes the child*, or *the child punishes the father*. So, also, you cannot compare English and French in the question of agreement of the past participle.

In both languages the past participle is considered to be an adjective, and placed under the same rule with it, which is all perfectly logical. Now, while the English language, with the exception of a few determinative words, has no flexive adjectives, the French language, on the contrary, is based on the principle of agreement of all its adjectives—which carries with it the agreement of the past participle also.

Consequently in suppressing in some cases

this agreement of the past participle, the reformers have created a new exception in French grammar in favor of the past participle—and truly we had a plenty. It was even the opinion of many that the task of the commission was to suppress exceptions and not to invent new ones. The action of the commission is all the more astonishing in this instance, since the principle of agreement is explicitly retained for the present participle (distinction between the "adjective verbal," and the participle as simple adjective).

This abolition of the rule of the past participle with *avoir* is so little justified, that even M. Auguste Renard cannot approve of it entirely, and proposes—an exception (!)

"Qu'il soit permis," he says, "à un réformateur peu suspect d'un excès de timidité, de hasarder une restriction: cette simplification, légitime partout ailleurs, n'est-elle pas, en un point-lorsque le complément du participe est le pronom *le, la, les*—contraire au génie de la langue et de l'usage? Prenons un exemple où la prononciation du participe n'étant pas la même au féminin qu'au masculin, l'oreille, le vrai juge de la langue, exige le féminin: *Ma maison n'existe plus, on l'a détruite* (et non *détruit*); *cette lettre, qui l'a écrite?* (et non *écrit*); avez vous fait votre malle? *je l'ai faite* (et non *fait*). Il y a là un accord imposé, non par le caprice des grammairiens, mais par le génie même de la langue. Les illettrés, les paysans même, ignorants de la grammaire, observent cette règle instinctivement. Je doute que, pour l'abolir, on puisse invoquer l'exemple des bons auteurs." 3

Let me say here in parenthesis that as a matter of fact, unless you apply in the strictest sense the phonetic orthography—which the

3 One may ask why, then, the past participle with *avoir* agrees with the object when this object precedes, and not when it follows? Because there is a different meaning in these two cases. Although not realized by everybody, although rather delicate, it appears, nevertheless, very positive as soon as you analyze the sentences before you. If the participle with *avoir* precedes the object the verb has more of an active sense in it, the past participle is a part of the active verb. If the past participle follows its object, the passive sense is emphasized, the past participle becomes a true determinative of the object. An example with adequate translation will clearly illustrate the distinction:

*J'ai vu les hommes* = I have been seeing the men (*I* have been seeing action).

*Je les ai vus* = I had them seen (*they* were seen = passive and plural).

Remember that you never have the past participle agreeing except when the object or person you are mentioning has been spoken of before. So the sentence may easily become passive: the object is the essential thing and the speaker lays stress on it naturally. Suppose I tell a story, the important thing is not that "*I* have seen them," but that "*they* were seen." If you wish to emphasize the other side, you either replace the pronouns by the nouns, and thus bring back the active verb, or else you may express it by the tone of your voice.

reformists have given up, not without reason—you will never be able to do away with exceptions. See the fifth part of Renard's *La nouvelle orthographe*, page 81 et seq., where you see the apparently simplest rules requiring a restriction of some sort; and see also the edict of July, chapter on Compound Nouns. Nay, even with the phonetic orthography you would not reach your end, since as we just saw in M. Renard's remark, sometimes the flexion of a word has a result in the pronunciation, sometimes not: *la page que j'ai écrite, les livres que j'ai écrits*. More than that, the pronunciation depends, as we know, frequently upon the next word: *les livres que j'ai écrits seront publiés, les livres que j'ai écrits à Paris*. Even if you were to use the phonetic orthography, you ought to know the rules of the past participle. Nor is it necessary to take an example like that of M. Renard, where a new consonant is heard in the case of the feminine. There is a distinct difference in pronunciation, between *je l'ai vu* and *je l'ai vue*, the first is short, the second is long. We thus confront the startling dilemma if we agree to carry through the reform: either we reform pronunciation at the same time with orthography, or we simply violate the rules of phonetics. Is it possible that the commission did not think of this? 4

4 Similarly in many cases of double consonants in nouns and adjectives: There is a very positive difference between *paysanne* and *courtesane* (the first short, the second long), there would be one between *bonne* and *bone*, the simplification proposed by the reformists, the first short, the second long (not change of sound from Greek *o* into *ω*, however). Thus the word *irrationality*, so profusely used by the reformists, is still here entirely out of place. It may be that the difference of pronunciation will, by and by, vanish; then it will be reasonable to suppress the superfluous letter, but if it is a bad thing to be behind one's times, it is not much better to be ahead of them, at least in such a matter as this. In very many cases the double consonant is still perfectly justified.

It may not be superfluous to point out that this is not in the least in contradiction with another passage in the first part of this article. When we criticized the way the reform had been taken up by the commission, we did not pretend to express our own opinion as to the suppression of double letters. We judged entirely from the standpoint of the reformists. As far as we are personally concerned, we do not feel positive at all that the pronunciation of  *mille*, for instance, is not slightly different in *mil huit cent douze*, and in *mille d'ars*. We should go so far as to admit a possible justification of a rule which demands *mil* in dates after Christ, and *mille* in dates before Christ. When we speak of our times, the word *mille* is after all secondary, the last part of the figure is important. On the contrary, if we speak of ancient times we take a broader view of the whole subject, and the big part of the figure will rather be insisted upon. This would betray itself in pronunciation by accentuation, accentuation brought about by unconsciously lengthening the word *mille*. This may seem very subtle; but who has ever seen any thorough treatment of a subject in the field of philology, which did not require a great delicacy of touch, and subtlety of reasoning?



But let us come back to the past participle. Of course you may pretend that the English system of invariability of adjectives and participles is superior to that of variability in French. But, again, this brings up the fundamental question, in how far both languages can be compared, which, it seems to us, cannot be solved but by linguists. On the other hand philology has not reached such a sufficiently advanced stage as to be able to answer the question properly. Even with scholars vague expressions like "génie de la langue," "instinct," "guidance by the ear" are constantly used. They are hard at work. When they will be able to tell us clearly what constitutes the genius of a language in general, or of each language in particular, it is difficult to foresee; but one thing is certain, that if ever anybody will know about it, they will be the ones: they will then have to decide, or rather it will naturally be decided, for each language what reforms can be taken up, which are rational and which are not. So far we are applying rules unconsciously, and scholars have been very prudent not to spoil a language by awkward corrections. And I think—at the risk of being called "réactionnaire"—they were right. The principle of simplicity, as it is understood by many reformists, is not the true one: the simplicity from the standpoint of scientific philology may sometimes, but certainly is not, ought not to be, the same as that from the standpoint of the general public. The present conditions of probably all living languages betray this. It would be much simpler, in the naïve, popular sense of the word, to have three genders in French instead of two, to have only one form for the three forms of the definite article, as in English, just as vice-versa, it would render the English language simpler if you had not to make the distinction between "who" and "which," or "his" and "her." Nobody asks for these changes because one realizes that there is some reason for it; we "feel" it as the term is: this feeling must become knowledge. Until then it will be better to avoid deforming languages while pretending to correct them. Where do the irrationalities of French grammar come from? From the grammarians of past times who did not know the natural conditions of things, and tried to atone for their ig-

norance by constructing artificial rules. What our task can be is to undo what they have committed. Our work will hardly be of great use if, in so doing, we prepare new work of the same kind for our descendants.

A few words before ending as to the attitude of the French Academy towards the "arrêté" of last July. A motion was made in the Academy protesting, not against the reform itself, but against the fact of not having been consulted before the reform be put into practice.

M. Georges Leygues then asked a report from the Academy, report to be delivered before October 15, date of application of the new standard in judging examinations. What the result of this step has been we do not know as yet.

Some have been surprised at this claim of the Academy to be consulted. What rather will surprise thinking people is, on the contrary, to see hesitation about the right of the Academy to have an opinion in the matter, and even to ask to have this opinion taken into consideration. The Academy, it has been repeatedly said, never took the first step in such reforms, the Academy always followed the general decision of the people; and in the prefaces of the *Dictionnaire*, the desire to do so has been constantly affirmed. Granted. Note, however, first that the Academy followed, if it was ascertained that the reform was good. Secondly, that the Academy followed "l'usage," and a new usage was a result of natural laws of phonetics and formation of language. Never before has anybody taken such *decisions* as the recent one of the Minister of Public Instruction that such and such rules shall no more be taught in schools, which amounts to nothing else than to *impose* the usage. The question looks then altogether different.

It is further said—a kind of anticipated answer to the above objection—that the "Université" had stopped the free evolution of usage by establishing, at the beginning of the century, an inflexible orthography; thus the University had to take the first steps by undoing the wrong done by itself in the past. This is going too far. The University, full of good will, is prevented by nothing we know of, from consulting the recognized authority on the matter in France, as to the suitableness

of the new rules to be officially imposed on the general public. From the standpoint of the partisans of the University, the Academy ought to be considered as a simple servant, that has to obey orders from elsewhere. Suppose, now, the Academy refuses its consent to the reforms proposed—or imposed, what then? Either go back again to the old orthography, or to pass over the judgment of the Academy, another disquieting dilemma.

This inconsistency has been felt, and the effort made to meet it by claiming that the Academy is more conservative to-day than in the past centuries; so, in not confirming the reform, the illustrious body would fail in its mission. This, however, appears to be a rather poor way of reasoning. It is true that by the two great reforms taken up by the Academy in the last century—the first in 1740 suppressing a number of double letters (*appanage*) and unpronounced letters (*doubter*, *advocat*) the second in 1762, distinguishing sharply *i* and *j*, and *u* and *v*, causing the alphabet to have twenty-five letters instead of twenty-three—it is true that by these reforms over five thousand words, the quarter of the whole number of the words of the dictionary at this time, have been reformed. But, then, the language was nearer its origins (the first edition of the dictionary dates from 1694), and it is only natural that the further away from the origins, the less changes would occur, consequently also a more conservative attitude is today only natural. We grant that there are simplifications to be brought up: but, after all, are they not rather a logical and more complete application of principles adopted? We may with reason ask that the *p* of *compter* be suppressed, as well as the *b* of *doubter* has been, that the first *t* of *attirer* be done away with like the first *d* of *addresser*. We may, further, believe that compound nouns will finally cease to be so and enter into the language like single words. However, as a matter of fact, up to the present time it has been a rule only for words composed with foreign elements to be cast into one: *bimensuel*, *chiropédie*, *nécromancie*. Words like *gendarme* are rather scarce, and so, although the future may very well see a uniform rule applied, it was per-

haps anticipating somewhat the event when the commission offered us the words of *essuimain*, *têtâtête*, *chêdœuvre*, etc. It is certainly desirable that uniformity be applied in odd cases like *millionième* one *n*, and *millionnaire*, two *n*'s. But our generation is too fond of arbitrary changes brought about under the name of progress. To be sure, science is for progress. But let it stick to the old distinction between sound progress and mere apparent progress. If towards certain tendencies of the general public science must prove conservative, it is in fact only in order to show a more positive kind of progress. So, it seems to us, that all linguists ought to stand by the Academy, when this body does try to maintain the rights of science and prevent us from being carried away by superficial enthusiasms. In a time of *popular* progress like ours, it requires often as much courage to be on the conservative side, as it did in times past to be on the side of progress.

We borrow from A. Renard, a list of the standard books, to be studied with reference to the question in recent years:

- Jean S. Barés: *L'orthographe simplifiée*. (Bureaux du "Réformiste.") Grammaire française, 105 pages. [Just out.]
- Michel Bréal: *Réforme de l'orthographe française* (Hachette).
- L. Clédât: *Grammaire raisonnée de la langue française—avec préface de M. Gaston Paris* (Le Soudier).
- M. Coty: *La révision de l'orthographe de l'Académie française* (Firmin Didot).
- Ernault et Chevaldin: *Manuel d'orthographe française simplifiée* (Rouillon).
- Louis Havet: *Simplification de l'Orthographe* (Hachette).
- Ch. Lebaigue: *La réforme orthographique et l'Académie française* (Plon et Nourrit).
- M. Malvezin: *Dictionnaire de la société philologique française* (Delagrave).
- Eug. Monseur: *Réforme de l'orthographe française* (Weissembrach, Bruxelles).
- Paul Passy: *Les Sons du français* (Firmin Didot).
- Aug. Renard: *La Nouvelle orthographe—avec un préface de M. Louis Havet* (Delagrave).

E. Rodhe: La nouvelle réforme de l'orthographe (Lund). [Just out.]

As to periodicals, two of them, the *Réformiste* of M. J. Barés, and the *Bulletin des Sommaires*, are printed entirely according to a new system of orthography. *Revue de philologie* is the organ of the French Society. *Revue Algérienne*, of the Colonial Association. The two Swiss and Belgian Associations publish *Bulletins*. As very favorable to the reform, may further be quoted: *L'école Nouvelle*, of M. Devinat, the *Journal des Instituteurs*, of M. Seignette, the *Revue pédagogique*, the official organ of primary instruction in France, the *Revue et Revue des Revues*, etc.

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# DIE ANTEZEDENTIEN DER HELENA IN GOETHE'S FAUST.

## V.

Wie sich Goethe die natürliche Entstehung eines Organismus dachte, sagt er selbst deutlich genug, und zwar zu einer Zeit, in der einerseits seine Überzeugung auf diesem Gebiet im Wesentlichen abgeschlossen war, andererseits eine Gestaltung der wissenschaftlichen Ansicht zu Gunsten der Faustdichtung, wenn eine solche Möglichkeit überhaupt anzunehmen wäre, unter allen Umständen ausgeschlossen bliebe. In dem bereits 1820 zuerst gedruckten Aufsatz "Bildungstrieb" (Zur Morphologie, I. Bd., 2. Heft: Ausgabe letzter Hand, Bd. 50, 47-64; Weim. Ausgabe, Abt. II, Bd. 7, S. 71 ff.) fasst Goethe seine Überzeugung, dass zur Entstehung eines lebenden Organismus drei Grundbedingungen zusammentreffen müssen (ein Aufzunehmendes = Stoff, ein Aufzunehmendes = Lebenskraft, und etwas, was vorausgehen musste, sei es als Prädelineation, Prädetermination, Prästabiliren = Form), schliesslich in dem "Schema" zusammen:

	Stoff.	
Vermögen.	} Leben.	
Kraft.		
Gewalt.		
Streben.		
Trieb.		
	Form.	

Die von Goethes Vorgängern (Caspar Fried-

rich Wolff: *vis essentialis*; Blumenbach: *nisus formativus*) verwendeten Ausdrücke genügen ihm nicht. Wolffs Auffassung, die auf eine organische Materie hindeutet, die zu dem zu belebenden Unbelebten hinzutreten müsste ("Epigenesis") befriedigt ihn nicht, weil "an einer organischen Materie, und wenn sie noch so lebendig gedacht wird, immer etwas Stoffartiges kleben bleibt." Der Ausdruck "Kraft" enthält nur etwas "Physisches, sogar Mechanisches, und das was sich aus jener Materie organisieren soll, bleibt uns ein dunkler unbegreiflicher Punkt." Blumenbach "anthropomorphosiert das Wort des Rätsels und nannte das, wovon die Rede war, einen *nisus formativus*, einen Trieb, eine heftige Thätigkeit, wodurch die Bildung bewirkt werden sollte." Aber auch das scheinen ihm "Worte zu sein, mit denen wir uns nur hinhalten," und so beschreibt er nur die ihm notwendig erscheinenden drei Bedingungen, die im Zusammenhang mit seinem Schema so zu verstehen sind, wie es oben erklärt worden ist. Das was das Aufzunehmende, der Stoff, aufzunehmen hat, bezeichnet er in dem Schema mit einer Reihe von Ausdrücken, die in wachsender Klarheit und Bestimmtheit das besagen, was er sonst als Lebenskraft, Lebensprinzip, das Lebendige benennt. Über die "einzelnen Betrachtungen und Aphorismen," die jetzt unter dem Titel "Über Naturwissenschaft im Allgemeinen" in der Weimarer Ausgabe, Abt. II, Bd. 11, S. 103-163 zu finden sind (über die ersten Drucklegungen giebt die Einleitung zu den Lesarten Auskunft) sagt R. Steiner, der Bearbeiter dieses Bandes, auf Seite 326: "S. 103-163 enthält die Quintessenz der Goetheschen Naturansicht in einzelnen Aphorismen," "S. 164-166 behandelt die Polarität als allgemeinstes Urphänomen." Auf S. 156 sagt Goethe:

"Das Lebendige hat die Gabe, sich nach den vielfältigsten Bedingungen äusserer Einflüsse zu bequemen und doch eine gewisse Selbständigkeit nicht aufzugeben:"

es vermag also einen bestimmten Charakter zu bewahren und sich zugleich den jedesmaligen Bedingungen anzupassen. Es ist das möglich, weil die Natur die "Gewandtheit" besitzt,

"wodurch sie, obgleich auf wenige Grundmax-